Another refugee poem

When he pulls up his sleeve
to show us the scab on his elbow
where he fell off the bicycle
donated by the Refugee Help
and I see again his forearm, striped
with the long comings of luxuriant hair
    I crumple and shout aloud
    I am slung into a sack of dark cloud
    its seams drawn tight with leather thongs
    and diminishing over the rooftops

My mind blinks, the room is the same
no one has moved, or spoken.
Or, someone said inconsequential words,
perhaps myself.

Is there no other woman
so afflicted? My age
deranges me with sudden lust,
I am powerless, encapsulated.

His sleeve falls back, but his forearm
fumes like lightning's after-image
across my retina. I pour out more tea.
Another year, or two, surely I will have learned
How to be in this marvellous world and not of it.

For a woman from the ‘Refugees’ Friends’

We meet like blind white birds
that failed to swerve.
When I see your hands’
gesture, fleecy with love, or your cheek
so wide and watchful,
I am mirrored, as you are.
Sister, I can't even tell
whether your heart
holds him as valuable
as I would have, whether you guess
a fraction of his mystery.
How could you, plain, admirable, bent on good,
endure the secret burning, the flicker
under the thick lashes? 'I cannot bear
to be with him, it is anguish.
Once for a game, he let me bite
against the muscle of his hand.
It was sweet with dangerous salt.
he laughed: Enough—
in his own language.'

Emissary

As if I knew already what Sharaf had to say, my eyes on his hands clasped between his knees as he leans forward, pretending hesitation out of courtesy.

So your war follows you into this passive peace, this place of bridges and islands. I have walked the streets and did not smell the blood and sulphur, or know that what deranged your hearts was not memory, as I believed, but promise. It is hope that splinters the melon of our simple love. I never smelled that jasmine. This is important. What is now cannot compare — though it seems to me more real, Sharaf's hands knitted in apology my loss opening like a quiet door.

From The Word for Sand (Toronto: Wolsak and Wynn, 1988).